



Canada's Late Premier.*

by the
Countess of Aberdeen.

WHAT manner of man was this whose death has stirred the heart of an Empire, whose memory was crowned with laurels by his Sovereign's own hand, and whose remains were borne across the ocean by one of Britain's proudest war ships, and followed to the grave by the representatives of army and navy, church and state, and of every party, class and creed, amidst the mourning of a people?



THE RIGHT HON. SIR JOHN THOMPSON, K. C. M. G.

Some will attribute the feeling which has been evoked to the dramatic character of his death—and truly all the circumstances surrounding it were such as to leave an indelible impression. Here was a man, still in the prime of life, who had risen by steady and successive steps, to the highest post of honor in his own country, at the head of a powerful party, and enjoying the respect of both friend and foe, called by his Queen to her palace to receive from herself, a signal mark of recognition of services which he had rendered to the Empire. And scarcely had he left her pres-

* Reprinted from THE OUTLOOK of January 26th, 1895.

ence when the startling news came that a higher summons had called him to the presence of the King of kings, and his sorrowing family and country were left to realize all the greatness of their loss.

All that queenly thoughtfulness and womanly sympathy could do to soothe the grief of those who loved him and the country which trusted him, was done by Queen Victoria who, in her respect for the religious persuasion of the dead, in her motherly tenderness towards the young daughter left fatherless far from her own home, and in her beautiful act of royal recognition of faithful service, in herself laying the victor's wreath of laurels on the coffin of the departed statesman, showed once more the secret of the power by which she has strengthened her throne and the British Constitution for well nigh sixty years.

Her government and her people caught up the note and honour after honour was offered to the remains of the late premier, and not only his own country, but every British colony throbbed responsively to this demonstration of the oneness of the British Empire and of the reality of the ties which unite all its component parts.

But when all this is said, and more than fully granted, can it be asserted that it was merely the accident of Sir John Thompson's death at Windsor Castle, and the consequences resulting therefrom, which occasioned the deep feeling perceptible amongst the crowds who attended his funeral, and which has left such a keen sense of bereavement from East to West in the wide Dominion, even after the first outburst of sorrow has spent itself?

What is the secret which has made the clergy of all denominations not only voice the sorrow of their people but hold up Sir John's life as a message to those who are left; and this, although in early manhood he had left the church of his fathers to join the Roman Catholic Communion?

What is it that makes his political foes speak as if they too have sustained a personal loss?

What is it that makes all patriotic citizens feel that they have been suddenly deprived of a national bulwark on which they depended for many years to come?

Why do those who were privileged to call him friend feel that a bright light has gone out and that a great darkness has overspread their lives?

There is but one answer to these questionings. The heart of the people is true to higher instincts when it gets a chance, and never has a man's career more exemplified the *power of character*, strong, elevated, trained *character*, than Sir John Thompson's.

He began life as a boy at Halifax, with but few advantages, saving those which lie in a public school education and in the influences of a cultured home, where all the proud traditions of mingled Irish and Scottish descent were cherished and made a means of inducing love and loyalty to the new country as well as to the old. His father, a literary man of no mean capacity, and a co-editor with Joseph Howe, was the reverse of wealthy,

and the youth had to work his way upwards by his own personal exertions. From the outset a distinguishing feature of his character was a marvellous power of concentration and habit of industry, and it was the cultivation of these qualities which enabled him by degrees to give proof of his more brilliant intellectual qualities and which insured his rise from the reporters' chair to the lawyer's office, and thence to be Alderman of his city, Member of the Provincial Legislature, Premier of his Province, Judge, Minister of Justice for the Dominion, Premier of Canada, representative of Great Britain during the International Arbitration Conferences, and at last, Privy Councillor of Great Britain.

In each and all of these capacities he has left a record which any man may well envy, and one founded not on mere brilliancy of eloquence, or ability to evoke popular sympathies, or cleverness in manipulating party politics.

Search through his life, ask those who knew him best, and there is but one testimony. Thoroughness of work, intensity of purpose, singleness of aim, unflinching conscientiousness and a prevailing sense of the Presence of God marked all he did or said. The poorest clients might depend on their case being gone into with the same thoroughness as was given in after years to a great legislative measure, or to the adjustment of an international question. Whether the matter was great or small which he had in hand, he considered it worthy of his best and his whole attention, and thus it has come about that during his comparatively brief tenure of office as Minister of Justice, he left the stamp of enduring work on the laws of the country, as for example, in the splendid accomplishment of the codifying of the criminal law, which he carried through with infinite pains and which has placed Canada ahead, in this respect, of many older countries. When listening to the details of a case, he would often sit looking immovable and irresponsive, but when the moment came for summing up, or charging the jury, it was found that not a point had escaped him, and that the just proportion and weight of all the facts were given with extraordinary precision and lucidity, and his arguments were so forcible as to carry all before them. His public speaking was eloquent, because of the matter which it contained and the strength of his reasoning, mingled with a quiet by-play of humour and kindliness. There was never any of that straining after effect, or the saying of words for the sake of saying them, which mark the utterances of weaker men. And in this, his speaking was after all, only typical of the man, who showed his greatness in his simplicity, humility, and entire absence of egotism or self-consciousness.

The success which he won in all that he undertook never spoilt him—to the end he was as a child—willing to learn from all and never so full of his own opinions as not to be able to listen to what others had to say. But when his turn came to speak, there was no hesitation, and he could hold his own with the best of them.

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The leading men who were engaged with him in the Behring Sea arbitration, and on other public occasions, whether in Canada, or in London, Paris or Washington, such as Lord Ripon, Lord Hannen, Lord Russell, Sir Richard Webster, Baronde Courcel, and Mr. Bayard, have all given their witness concerning the great influence exercised by Sir John's ability and strength, and calm judicial powers, and it was impossible for anyone to come into close contact with him without being impressed with his exceptional qualities.

But not all knew that beneath the calm, almost impassive exterior there raged a volcano, and that it was only by stern self-government that he had obtained the mastery which stood him in such good stead.

Many who knew him only as the inflexible judge, whose severity in cases where there was the slightest deviation from honesty and uprightness was proverbial, could scarcely credit the tenderness of his heart when he had to deal with the erring, the poor and the afflicted in a private capacity, or know what he was as a husband, father and friend in the midst of his own home circle.

Of his personal scrupulous honesty and incorruptibility many instances could be given, but it is enough to point to the fact that he died a very poor man, although he had been in a position where he could have grasped at wealth, and that not his bitterest enemy can whisper a word against his memory. But even to mention the fact seems to insult him. What else could be expected from one of whom it is told that, when a woman whose savings he had invested for her many years ago, in what was considered a good investment, came to tell him that she had lost her money, he actually contrived with great inconvenience to himself, to give her back the money, conceiving himself in a measure responsible for the loss.

And when his change of religion threatened to wreck his worldly prospects, he faced the worst and was willing to endure poverty and toil for himself and his family rather than not be true to his convictions. And once again, only a few weeks before his death, he was warned that continuance in the public service might—nay *would* probably mean death to him, whereas rest and change of climate would probably restore him to health. But to his mind his duty was clear. "It would be cowardly to resign now," he said. And so he remained at his post, and at his post he died, and to few has it been given to work so much good for their country by their death.

Is it then matter for wonder that Canada and the British Empire mourn, and that his country and his friends can only yield him to the great beyond with resignation when they meditate on the abiding influence of his life and character and believe that it will surely inspire many young lives in the future to devote themselves thus also gloriously to the service of their country and their God?

